

STATEMENT OF DANIEL N. WENK, DEPUTY DIRECTOR, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, U. S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS OF THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES, CONCERNING S. 327 AND H.R. 359, BILLS TO AUTHORIZE THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR TO CONDUCT A SPECIAL RESOURCE STUDY OF SITES ASSOCIATED WITH THE LIFE OF CESAR ESTRADA CHAVEZ AND THE FARM LABOR MOVEMENT

September 11, 2007

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to present the views of the Department of the Interior on S. 327 and H.R. 359, bills to authorize the Secretary of the Interior to conduct a special resource study of sites associated with the life of Cesar Estrada Chavez and the farm labor movement.

The Department supports both bills, which are virtually identical to each other and to legislation that we supported during the 108th and 109th Congresses. While the Department supports the authorization of this study, we also believe that any funding requested should be directed first toward completing previously authorized studies. We recommend a technical amendment to S. 327, described later in this statement.

This study will provide a good opportunity to work with the Cesar E. Chavez Foundation and others to identify valuable resources associated with the story of Chavez's life and the movement he led and ways to protect those resources. Ask historians to name one person who had the greatest impact on farm labor, and the name of Cesar Estrada Chavez leaps to mind. Between the 1950's and the 1980's Chavez cultivated a life-long commitment to bringing respect, dignity, and democracy to the nation's farmworkers, many of whom were Hispanic. After an initial career as a community organizer, Chavez focused his organizing skills on the farmworkers,

inspiring them to look their employers in the eyes, stand up for their rights and take active roles in creating their union and wielding its power. As a result of his efforts, he continues to serve as a symbol not only for Hispanic-Americans, but for all Americans, of what can be accomplished in this country through unified, courageous, and nonviolent action.

Chavez's death on April 22, 1993, brought a resurgence of interest in his life and work and a new wave of assessments recognizing his national and, indeed, international significance. He has taken his place among other national labor leaders in the Department of Labor's Hall of Fame and been recognized by an ever-increasing number of states and communities with special holidays, events, and place names. Because of the tremendous impact he had, we believe it is appropriate to study sites associated with Cesar Chavez and the farm labor movement he led in order to consider ways to preserve and interpret this story of enormous social change.

The National Park Service and the Cesar E. Chavez Foundation first discussed the possibility of conducting a national historic landmark study of sites related to the work of Chavez and the farmworkers' movement several years ago, as a way of identifying sites important to the history of the man as well as the migrant worker. The Foundation represents and fosters the ongoing legacy of Chavez and has a strong interest in seeing that heritage preserved. In 2002, the National Park Service collaborated with the Foundation and scholars at universities in Washington State and California in preparing a preliminary assessment and scope for future research on sites associated with Chavez and the farmworkers' movement. The information gathered through that assessment would give the National Park Service a head start on the study authorized by S. 327 and H.R. 359.

The legislation would authorize a study of sites in Arizona, California, and other States that are significant to the life of Cesar Chavez and the farm labor movement in the western United States to determine appropriate methods for preserving and interpreting sites. Through this study, the National Park Service could examine whether certain sites are suitable and feasible for addition to the National Park System. The study would be conducted in accordance with the criteria for new area studies contained in Title III of the National Parks Omnibus Management Act of 1998.

The study also would consider whether any sites meet the criteria for listing on the National Register of Historic Places or for designation as a National Historic Landmark. This would enable the National Park Service to complete the work that was begun with the preliminary assessment described earlier. The legislation specifically requires that the National Park Service consult with the Cesar E. Chavez Foundation, the United Farm Workers Union, and other entities involved in historic preservation on this study. The study is estimated to cost approximately \$250,000.

If the committee acts on S. 327, we recommend amending it on page 1, line 6 and on page 2, line 1 by inserting “special” before “resource study” to use the term for the proposed study that is normally used for such studies and to make it consistent with the title of the bill. H.R. 359 as passed by the House includes this change, which the Department recommended in testimony before the House Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands on March 29, 2007.

Mr. Chairman, that concludes my testimony. I would be pleased to answer any questions you or the other members of the subcommittee may have.